

State Representative Mary Lou Dickerson

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to tell you about some of the issues I'm working on as your representative and to invite your thoughts on state priorities

I'm happy to report that the 2008 legislative session got off to a quick start and the mood in our state capitol is upbeat. Our local economy is still doing well, our state budget is in good shape, and we're on pace to make this a very productive 60-day session. But even though our state is doing well and Washingtonians are leading the nation in income growth, there are still problems lurking in the shadows.

For example, scientists warn that lead-tainted toys and other toxic products are threatening children's IQs and health. Further, despite our prosperity, many families are struggling financially and too many people are losing their homes and living in their cars or sleeping on the streets.

I believe we have a moral duty to solve these problems, and this newsletter shows some of what we can do to make a difference. You'll also see brief statements on other issues I'm working on as your representative.

As always, I welcome any thoughts or suggestions you have. You can use the contact information on this page to get a message to me quickly, and I'd enjoy hearing from you. It is a pleasure as well as an honor to represent the best district in the state!

Sincerely,

Mary Lou
Mary Lou

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36th Legislative District



The 2008 Legislative Session





Protecting kids from toxic toys

Parents are alarmed by recent recalls of millions of toys—including such favorites as Elmo—that were found to have illegal levels of lead in paint. After all, parents shouldn't have to guess whether their children's toys are free from lead or other toxic substances that can lower IQ's or damage reproductive or nervous systems.

What is even scarier is that federal law on toxics in toys and other children's products *only* regulates lead in paint. The law doesn't cover dangerous levels of lead in plastics or other materials that kids touch or put in their mouths, and it doesn't address toxic risks like arsenic in toys. *These toxic threats to kids are not regulated, and parents are not informed about them!* As KOMO TV's Connie Thompson put it: "It's not just lead, and no one's guarding the toy box."



In fact, new tests reveal shockingly high levels of lead and other toxics in children's toys that are on the shelves of typical stores.

- More than one-third (35%) of all toys tested contained lead. Worse, fully 17 percent had lead levels *above* the federal recall standard for lead paint. For example, tests showed that a plastic cuff sold with the Fisher Price Medical Kit had more than *five times* the lead as the federal recall standard for lead paint!
- Numerous toys were tainted with cadmium, arsenic and other toxic chemicals.
- Nearly half of all tested toys were made of PVC plastic—a hazardous plastic for toys because it has additives like phthalates that can cause abnormal reproductive development.

In addition to toxic toys, tests showed that many other infant and children's products—including baby bibs, baby bottles, and baby shampoos and lotions—often contain high levels of toxic substances that are linked to a wide variety of adverse health effects.

There is an answer to these dangers. I'm working with the Washington Toxics Coalition, pediatricians and children's advocates for a state law that will protect children's health and respect parents' rights. Our legislation will ban the most dangerous chemicals (such as lead, cadmium and phthalates) from



Mary Lou and Washington Toxics Coalition scientist Erika Schreder explain how we can protect kids against toxics in children's products.

toys and other children's products, and will also inform consumers about other chemicals the products contain.

There is an outstanding web site to help parents learn more about the dangers of toxic toys: www.healthytoys.org. This free resource shows why we need stronger laws to protect kids, and it even allows parents to search a database of over 1,200 products to see if a particular product is known to contain toxic risks.

It's time for the law to be on the side of parents and kids. I hope and believe we will pass a strong law this legislative session to help parents and get the toxics out of children's products that are sold in our state.

Helping the homeless

It is sad that in our prosperous county there were 110 homeless deaths in 2006, including deaths in Ballard. I'm working with churches and local residents to provide emergency



shelter, warm sleeping bags and other assistance to help the homeless make it through the cold winter nights. I'm proud of our community's compassion and neighbor-to-neighbor response to the plight of the homeless, but we need a better effort from our state.

Our state's response to homelessness rightly emphasizes preventive services and permanent housing. However, we're doing far too little to support emergency shelters. In fact, between July 2006 and July 2007, 167,000 people were turned away from emergency shelters because there was simply no room for them. Of those turned away, 42,227 were households with children.

Surely, we can do better. I'm calling on lawmakers to provide more help to local communities that need to create additional emergency shelters. In a great state like ours, no homeless person should ever have to die of neglect on our streets.

Easing impacts of condo conversions

During the past three years in Seattle, more than 5,500 households—including many vulnerable elderly citizens—have faced life-wrenching displacements because developers are rapidly converting



affordable housing into condominiums. Local governments are asking for the ability to cushion the severe impacts of condo conversions on homelessness, family finances, and the fast-disappearing supply of affordable housing.

After listening to all sides of the issue, I'm supporting a law to: (1) Require 120 days of notice to tenants prior to a condo conversion; (2) Prohibit disruptive construction during the notice period; (3) Allow local restrictions on the number and pace of condo conversions; and (4) Allow local governments to require that developers pay reasonable relocation assistance to displaced tenants. Passing these reforms is a top priority of the Committee to end Homelessness in King County. I hope we can enact them this year.

Gun and campus safety: Lessons from Virginia

The mentally-disturbed murderer of 32 people in the Virginia Tech



massacre was able to buy his deadly weapons because Virginia's 'ineligible for firearms' database had no record of his court-ordered mental health treatment. It could happen here.

The Attorney General, King County Prosecutor and other experts say we need to fix a similar dangerous gap in our 'ineligible for firearms' database. I support their call for a law to ensure that court orders for treatment of dangerous mental disorders are reported to the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Licensing.

In the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy, Gov. Gregoire is also proposing new campus-safety strategies for the University of Washington and other colleges, including instant campus warning systems, community notification systems, and maps to help first responders. Passing these reforms will make college students safer. Let's not wait for another tragedy before we take decisive action.

Action briefs

We're working on many more issues than I can describe in this newsletter. I'll talk about education, health care and several other key issues in my spring newsletter. But here is a quick sample of some other goals I hope we can achieve this year:

- Prevent anyone from publishing private cell-phone information in commercial directories unless they get written permission in advance from the cell-phone consumer.
- Strengthen consumer protection laws to increase prosecutions of people who install or facilitate computer spyware.
- Offer intensive in-home support for parents of children who have developmental disabilities and severe behavioral issues. In-home services will help to prevent the heartache (and taxpayer costs) of institutionalizing the children.
- Enact severe penalties against con artists who trick people into transferring home ownership rights through fraudulent "foreclosure rescues."
- Improve safety for vulnerable adults by conducting fatality reviews and responding to lessons learned when an elderly adult dies from abuse or neglect.
- Give the Insurance Commissioner the authority to block unreasonable premium increases in the health insurance individual market.